

The Williams-Hunt Collection

Aerial photographs and cultural landscapes in Malaysia and Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

Cultural and academic links between SOAS and the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) include academic and cultural exchange. The Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS) of aerial photographs adds an archival dimension stemming from the life and work of Peter Williams-Hunt (1919-1953). Williams-Hunt is best known for his role as Advisor to the Aborigines in Malaysia shortly after World War II. During this period, he wrote several seminal articles on the Orang Asli. He was also a trained aerial photographic interpreter and collected more than 5000 aerial photographs of Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and miscellaneous areas of Vietnam during his postings to Southeast Asia during the war. The author had new copies made of the old photographs and compiled them into a database as part of her doctoral work in the 1980s. At present, thanks to collaboration with Surat Lertlum in Thailand, many parts of the aerial archive are now available online. The article summarizes aspects of the Williams-Hunt Collection and discusses the unique contribution made by Williams-Hunt to archaeology, anthropology and museum collections. His work on ancient settlements pioneered the analysis of the archaeological landscape and his anthropological study was the first to document the changing pattern of the landscape of the many different groups cultivating the forested regions of peninsular Malaysia.

Key words: Peter Williams-Hunt, aerial photographs, archaeological landscapes, cultural landscapes

ABSTRAK

Hubungan budaya dan akademik antara SOAS dan Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) termasuklah pertukaran akademik dan budaya. Koleksi foto udara Williams-Hunt (SOAS) menambah dimensi arkib hasil kehidupan dan kerja Peter Williams-Hunt (1919-1953). Williams-Hunt paling dikenali melalui peranannya sebagai Penasihat kepada Orang Asli di Malaya tidak lama selepas Perang Dunia ke II. Dia juga merupakan seorang pentafsir foto udara yang terlatih dan mengumpul lebih

daripada 5000 foto udara Malaysia, Singapura, Myanmar, Thailand, Kampuchea dan pelbagai kawasan Vietnam apabila ditugaskan di Asia Tenggara semasa perang. Penulis mempunyai salinan baru yang dibuat berdasarkan foto lama dan telah mengkompilaskannya dalam bes data sebagai sebahagian daripada kerja kedoktorannya pada tahun-tahun 1980an. Dengan kerja sama Surat Lertlum di Thailand, kini banyak bahagian arkib foto udara tersebut dapat dicapai di talian. Makalah ini meringkaskan tentang Koleksi Williams-Hunt dan membincangkan sumbangan unik beliau terhadap arkeologi, antropologi dan koleksi muzium. Kerja-kerja Williams-Hunt tentang petempatan lama telah menerokai analisis landskap arkeologi. Kajian antropologinya pula adalah merupakan dokumen yang pertama tentang perubahan pola landskap banyak kumpulan-kumpulan yang bertani di kawasan hutan Semenanjung Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Peter Williams-Hunt, foto udara, landskap arkeologi, landskap budaya



Photo 1. Peter Darrel Rider Williams-Hunt during World War II
(Photos courtesy of Tony Williams-Hunt)

CULTURAL STUDIES – ATMA AND SOAS

I thank the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (*ATMA*), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) for inviting me to the Institute and the contact with your research community from 10-14 October 2009. It was an honour to come and I extend my sincere thanks for the arrangements and time given by so many individuals in making my stay convivial and productive. I would like to thank in particular the Director of ATMA, Prof. Dr. Abd. Latif Samian; the Deputy Director, Prof. Dato' Dr. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abd. Rahman and Principal Research Fellow, Dato' Zawiyah Baba (Library & Information Science).¹ Finally, I owe a special thanks to Tony Williams-Hunt, who arranged for me to



visit the grave site of his father, P.D.R. Williams-Hunt (1919-1953) (Photo 1) in Tapah. The visit and discussions with Tony gave a human dimension to my understanding of his father whose collection of aerial photographs guided my doctoral and subsequent research over the last twenty-five years. Thus in different ways, all the individuals I met shared thoughts and research ideas which led to stimulating conversations that I look forward to following up in future.

To find scholars working on subjects as varied as the rich archaeology of the late first millennium CE of Bujang Valley, the significance of brick architecture in the formation of early maritime polities and the pan-Southeast Asian motifs shared by textiles, woodcarving and jewellery widened my appreciation of the complex connections between the art and archaeology of the Malay world and the cultures of mainland Southeast Asia. I was pleased to formally complete the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) begun with the visit of the SOAS Director, Professor Paul Webley in July of this year through which we can begin to develop these and other academic connections between our institutions. I also am grateful to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London and the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (ARI/NUS) for helping to facilitate my trip.

The links between SOAS and UKM reach across many departments of SOAS and numerous decades. In recent years, the National Museum of Malaysia hosted *Rupa Malaysia: A Decade of Art 1987-1997: An Exhibition of Malaysian Contemporary Art* at the SOAS Brunei Gallery from 10th March – 30th May 1998. The exhibition catalogue published by Balai Seni Lukis Negara was greatly influenced by the late Redza Piyadasa (1939-2007), the chief curator for the show (Yong 2007). His energy and verve informed the exhibit and inspired many of my SOAS students who came to the exhibit and to hear Redza Piyadasa and other artists from the show deliver academic talks on the development of modern art in Malaysia and the themes of the *Rupa Malaysia* in the Brunei Lecture Theatre of SOAS. The Brunei Gallery was donated to SOAS by His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei in the 1990s and although the gallery has since hosted a 2008 exhibit from the National Museums of Brunei, *Rupa Malaysia* was the first exhibit from Southeast Asia to be mounted in the Brunei Gallery.

The SOAS Brunei Gallery hosted a second exhibit from Malaysia in early 2004, *The Spirit of Wood*, profiling the unique living tradition of 'Lankasuka' wood-carving from Terengganu on the east coast of Malaysia (Farish A. Noor & Eddin Khoo 2003). In the academic talks and papers generated from this exhibit, many of the observations of Rosnawati Othman on harmony and contrast relate well to the varied cultural landscapes of Malaysia. These range from the calm yet immense spaces of Putrajaya to the remnants of colonial architecture in the Perak Museum of natural history, the Buddhist and Hindu brick structures of first millennium CE Bujang Valley in Kedah and the many forested villages of the *Orangi Asli*. Equally relevant to broad scope of the Malaysian aesthetic are objects in the SOAS Permanent Collection displayed in the Foyle Special

Collection room of the Brunei Gallery. These include a silver *Songket*, many fine illustrated manuscripts such as an 1882 copy of the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and a Kelantan 'Charm Book' (Moore 2007).

As these few examples illustrate, defining culture, be it a ethnic groups, material culture or landscapes has many dimensions. Meanings and interpretation of both have changed throughout time and in different areas, with some scholars highlighting the disparity between European and indigenous definitions of cultural identity (Milner 2008). Varied aspects of this identity, however, draw in religious studies, history, anthropology, art history and archaeology within a shared cultural world moving beyond dichotomies of local and 'other' to address the vitality rather than the gaps generated by difference.

The Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS) makes a unique contribution to this multi-disciplinary discourse by giving it a conceptual and geographical locus in different times and spaces. The conceptual meanings may be conscious or unrecognized but inform the many ways that man has adapted to and modified the world around him. Geographically, the thousands of aerial photographs collected by Williams-Hunt during and just after World War II show the mountains, rivers and streams within which social and political hierarchies developed. Many of these areas covered by the Williams-Hunt Collection have changed dramatically since the 1940s, making the archive a valuable record by which to chart economic, demographic and cultural transformations. The formation and sustenance of cultural identities in relation to the 'places' seen in the photographs thus draws upon and evokes comparison within physical, social, religious and many other contexts (Yeoh & Kong 1995).

This inseparable conceptual and physical reality of the landscape is often left out of history but in the various ways that human beings occupy spaces, the changing topography reflects and is sustained by the relationship between man and his environment. This terrain narrates what went before in ways often empirically 'invisible' that give cultural testimony to present uses of those many pasts. It is in the context of this bond between man and place that the life and work of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt is described below.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN MALAYSIA

Bertrand Russell once noted that 'Man needs, for his happiness, not only the enjoyment of this or that, but hope and enterprise and change'. The life and work of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt (1919-1953) bespeaks a man who understood such ideas of change and enterprise well, for during his brief lifetime, Williams-Hunt made significant contributions to our understanding of how aerial photography can help interpret manmade alterations to the ancient and recent cultural landscapes of Southeast Asia. His analysis of the diverse patterns of ancient water management in Northeast Thailand, for example, showed the

antiquity of human interaction with the environment and his work on the changing patterns of *Orang Asli* settlement in peninsular Malaysia showed the need to map ongoing change in human settlement.

Williams-Hunt's *Orang Asli* land use typology added a new dimension to the more usual linguistic classification of *Orang Asli* groups (Benjamin 1976). The interaction of *Orang Asli*, Chinese and transient 'bandit' groups land use profiles a complex network that probably existed for many centuries for such interaction has long underpinned intra-peninsular and trans-regional exchange along maritime and mainland routes.² Thus while his work addressed the mid-twentieth century CE, there is every reason to think that many similar patterns of inland-coast interaction and overland and maritime trade existed in much earlier periods such as seen in the extensive remains of the ancient sites of the Bujang Valley. These give evidence of feeder points, collecting centres and monumental entrepôts whose artifacts span the metal age and early historic period.

The presence of early sites from Guar Kepah in Kedah to Gua Cha in Kelantan and Jenderam Hilir in Selangor testify to the widespread interchange that may well have centred on the upland-lowland exchange made possible to by the *Orang Asli* (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman 2007). The artifacts and temples of Bujang valley indicate long distance patterns of maritime and inland exchange with areas further north. For example, marked bricks, ritual structures, glass beads and votive tablets similar to ones excavated at Bujang are found at early Buddhist sites in peninsular and central Myanmar.³ Thus in a wider context, the work of Williams-Hunt presaged current academic discussion on the conceptual and empirical inter-relationship of anthropology with other disciplines (Lehman 1972).

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

Throughout P.D.R. Williams-Hunt's career and his multi-disciplinary research, he used his 'acute powers of observation' to define and classify patterns of change in the landscape, giving geographical and social context to the formation of cultures.⁴ In the course of his research, Williams-Hunt assembled a valuable archive of aerial photographs dating to World War II and the post-war era in the case of Malaysia. These photographs are now housed at in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London with copies of the prints held by several National Archives, libraries, research institutions and research foundations. As noted below, many of the prints are also now online in thumbnail, overview and high-resolution images that have enhanced the original World War II prints substantially.⁵

THE EARLY YEARS AND WORLD WAR II

The Williams-Hunt Collection at SOAS is named in honour of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, aerial photographic interpreter for the British army and then at the end of World War II, appointed in 1946 as the first Advisor to the Aborigines in Malaysia (Moore 1988). There was at that time, little understanding of the complex culture of the many *Orang Asli* peoples, as seen in the following quotation:

“Some of the world’s most primitive people are living in the great Malayan equatorial rain forest...and we know next to nothing about them...they are still almost a shut book, for as yet investigators have but skimmed the surface of this huge field” (‘The Jungle Folk’, *Straits Times* on 18 March 1950; courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt 10.09)

Born in Caversham, Berkshire, Williams-Hunt became interested in archaeology as a child and in his adolescent years joined the Berkshire Archaeological Society. In 1940, at the age of 21, he was listed on the Society’s membership list as P.D. Rider Williams-Hunt, Royal Fusiliers, Hounslow (Moore 1984). During the war, he served as a photographic interpreter and near the end of the war in Europe was posted with the Army Photographic Interpretation Unit (APIU) to Italy, where he met John Bradford.

The encounter was a significant one for him, as in their leisure hours the two officers flew over the area mapping the patterning of Roman centuriation fields (Williams-Hunt & Bradford 1946). This was pioneering work, making use of the rapid development of aerial photography and map-making prompted by the war. The Italian experience was then applied by Williams-Hunt when he was sent to Southeast Asia with the close of the European front.

He published a number of articles during postings in Bangkok, Saigon and Singapore, including a seminal study of sites in Northeast Thailand which figured largely in the author’s doctoral research (Williams-Hunt 1950). During his years in Singapore, he acquired photographs of other Southeast Asian areas as well, carefully selecting images with archaeological or ethnographic sites or topographic features of note.

The Williams-Hunt pictures of Thailand (1671 images) cover far more than the area of Northeast Thailand of used in my doctoral work for they contain many other ancient cities, from Lamphun to Ayutthaya. The set of the Williams-Hunt photographs held by the National Library in Bangkok has been used by many, for example the Fine Arts Department in planning renovation of some of the city’s Buddhist *wats* or assembly halls.

The cover of Singapore (240 images) records many areas now transformed by urban redevelopment including the Fullerton Building at the entrance to the Singapore River (Photo 2), airfields such as Sembawang used during the war, and the causeway linking Singapore and Johore Bahru in Malaysia. The Williams-Hunt photographs held in the National Library of Singapore are part

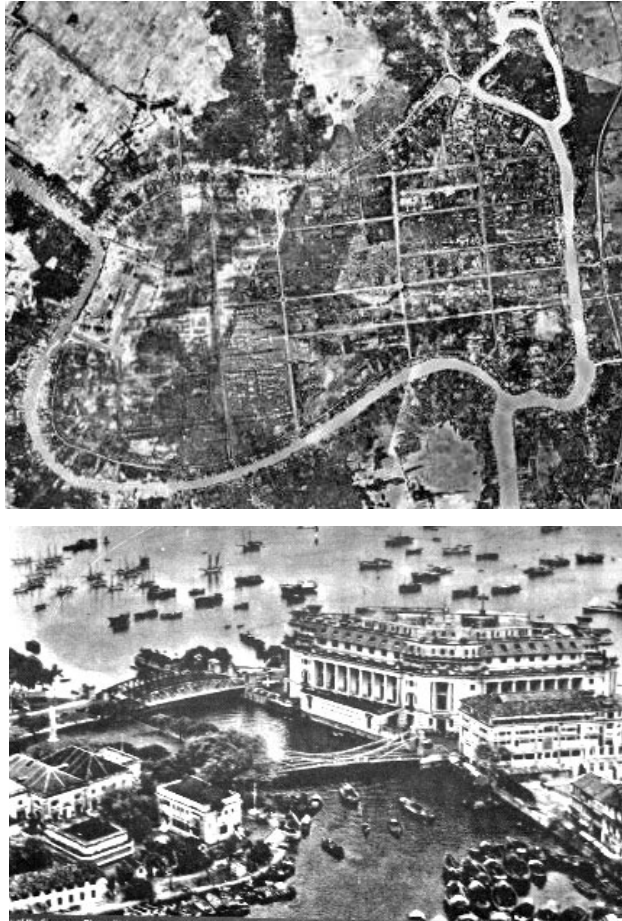


Photo 2. Mosaic of Ayutthaya and Fullerton Building and Singapore River, Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS)

of larger early aerial holdings documented and mapped in Brenda Yeoh and Theresa Wong's volume, *Over Singapore 50 years ago: An aerial view in the 1950* (Yeoh & Wong 2007).

The images of Myanmar (821 photographs) in the collection date to 1944 during the Japanese occupation and were used to produce maps for the Allied effort to regain control of the country. The pictures include vertical images of ancient sites such as Mandalay and Thaton and oblique views of the 11th century CE Shwezigon pagoda (Photo 3). The Cambodia pictures (151 images) are also verticals and oblique images, part of cover flown probably in preparation for a visit by Lord Mountbatten to the 12th century CE temple of Angkor Wat. Other

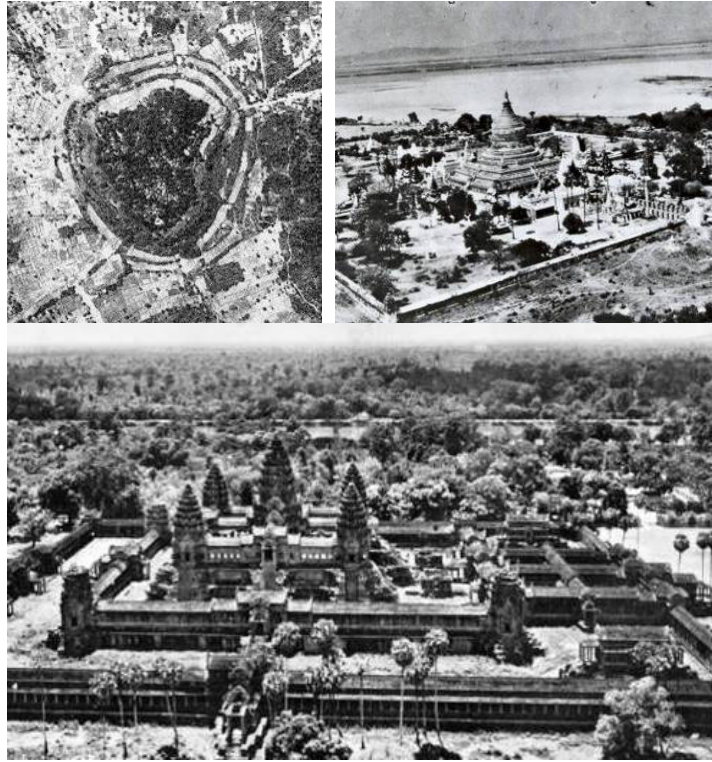


Photo 3. Ancient ramparts of Ban Thamen Chai, Buriram, Northeast Thailand, the Shwezigon pagoda, Myanmar and Angkor Wat temple, Cambodia, Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS)

images are vertical runs in the area of Angkor documenting the limits of the ancient construction and the patterns of land use in the 1940s.

ADVISOR TO THE ABORIGINES

As noted above, at the close of World War II and his demobilization with the rank of Major, Williams-Hunt was posted to Malaysia. His appointment was first associated with the Department of Social Welfare, and then with the anti-communist Malayan Emergency (1948–60), made part of the Department for the Welfare of the Aborigines (*Jabatan Orang Asli*) (Photo 4) within the Federal Secretariat. Williams-Hunt was tasked with administering various programmes to gain support by the *Orang Asli* and thus prevent occupation of remote villages with guerrilla troops.⁶ It was a tense time, as noted in the citation below, written by a nurse who knew Williams-Hunt well:



Photo 4. P.D.R. Williams-Hunt during the Emergency and with his friend Tony Beamish (after Jungle Nurse 1960)

"In early 1951, at the height of the Malayan Emergency...Tapah was one of the worst areas in the country...Ambushes on the main roads running out from it were an almost daily occurrence. Murders were several a day, as the Communist guerrillas came briefly out of the deep jungle for their hit and run raid, or their forays for food and to extort money from the people." (Gouldsbury 1960).

A report in the *Straits Times* put matters more dramatically, with a headline from November 6, 1952 reading "*Many aborigines face threat of Red domination*".⁷ It was in this difficult context that Williams-Hunt's continued use of aerial photography is so striking. Soon after arrival in Malaysia, he began to adapt his interest in land use patterns demonstrated by his 1950 article on the distribution of archaeological settlements in Northeast Thailand to the very different landscape of the Malaysian peninsula. His job was to help and enlist the support of the *Orang Asli*, a logistically and psychologically complex task that he managed with enthusiasm and seeming ease.

Some estimates of the time put the number of *Orang Asli* at 100, 000, although (with the caveat that the data was incomplete) Williams-Hunt more

conservatively estimated 34,000. The many small groups were primarily located in Perak such as the area of Tapah described by Gouldsbury, as well as Kelantan and Pahang.⁸ Often called by the derogatory term ‘Sakai’ Williams-Hunt’s combination of humor and bluntness prompted him to reply to a Government officer’s query on the number of Sakai in a certain area that “There are no Sakais, only Aborigines.”⁹

More than 2600 aerial photographs in the Williams-Hunt Collection date from this period. Many of these photographs were carefully annotated by Williams-Hunt, a painstaking task given the low visibility of the varied *Orang Asli* settlements. For example, he often traced out the course of small streams in the thick forested areas where settlements were generally located.

MUSEUMS AND AIR PHOTOS

Despite his immense undertaking as Advisor to the Aborigines in these years, Williams-Hunt did not abandon his earlier archaeological interests. Thus for example, in a 1948 article, he noted the changing dimensions of mangrove-rich portions of the Singapore and Johore shorelines with partially ground axes, microliths and rough flakes surveyed by himself and H.D. Collings of the Raffles Museum (Williams-Hunt 1948).

The museum in Kuala Lumpur had been badly bombed during World War II and Williams-Hunt then became involved in its rebuilding near the Lake Gardens after the war. S.M.V. Turnbull, at that time Member of Home Affairs, drew up a five year plan under the Federal Government to create a museum to profile the culture of the whole Federation. Some objects remained from the earlier collection, including a highly prized piece of Greek pottery dated to 600 BCE found years earlier in Malaya. The plan was strongly backed by the High Commissioner, General Sir Gerald Templer.

In October 1952, Williams-Hunt, acting Director the Museum, had travelled to England, in part to request donation of cultural materials to the new museum by the many former residents of Malaya.¹⁰ Williams-Hunt was subsequently made Director of the rebuilt Museums for the Federation of Malaya. He also assisted the British Museum with collection of *Orang Asli* goods, as well as zoological specimens sent to the Raffles Museum and rare orchid species sent to the Singapore Botanical Gardens.¹¹

In his newly created post as Advisor to the Aborigines, Williams-Hunt could access aerial cover easily, and assembled complete ‘runs’ of continuous images with sixty percent overlap to allow stereoscopic viewing from many sorties flown under ‘Operation Firedog’ and other missions flown between 1947-1949. Williams-Hunt quickly employed his aerial photo interpretation expertise to the varied forest ecologies of the Malaysian peninsula, with a simple guide assembled in his unpublished booklet *Jungle Clearings* (Photo 5) and used in his published guide to the *Orang Asli*.¹²

Jungle Clearings, part of the holdings at SOAS, is a hand-bound pasted with original photographs and annotations by Williams-Hunt. Prepared in 1948, it provides a valuable record of the difference between what Williams-Hunt called Bandit Camps, Chinese Squatters (Photo 6), and Aboriginal new fellings, occupied *ladangs* (Photo 7) and abandoned *ladangs*. Williams-Hunt hoped that the booklet might ensure that the

‘Malay aborigines (Sakai) should be left unharmed’. These people, while shy, will prove of invaluable assistance to troops on the ground and little progress can be undertaken through the jungle without their aid. Naturally if assaulted from the air in error for bandits they will completely disappear.’

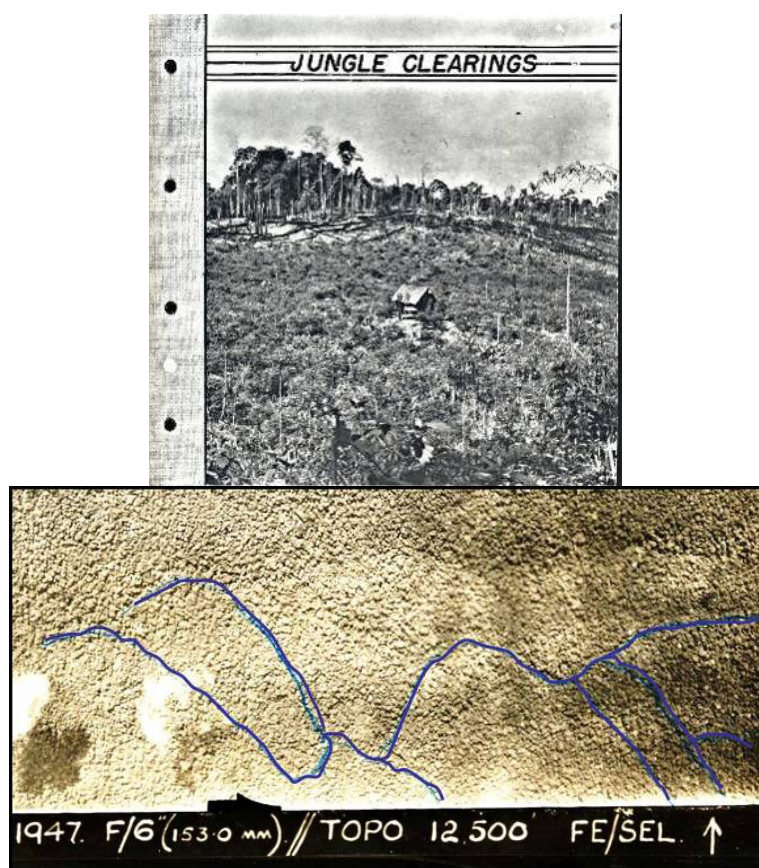


Photo 5. *Jungle Clearings*, Cover Photo by H.D. Collings, Raffles Museum, Singapore. The image noted as Ulu Bera, Pahang, with last year's tapioca in the foreground, new felling burnt off but not yet planted in the background and 'Virgin jungle' rising in the rear; On the bottom detail is aerial photograph of southeast region showing annotations by Williams-Hunt taken August 29, 1947.



Photo 6. Chinese Squatter settlement, Jungle Clearings, Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS)

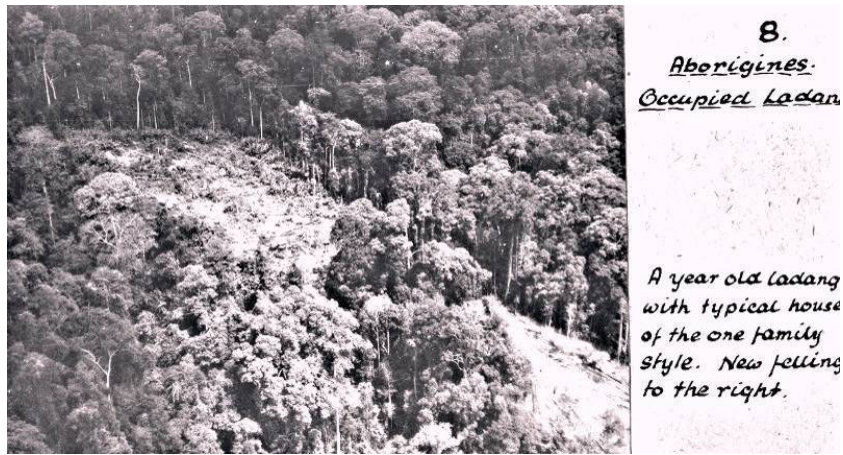


Photo 7. Occupied ladang, annotation by Williams-Hunt, Jungle Clearings, Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS)

THE MALAY COVER IN THE WILLIAMS-HUNT COLLECTION

The 2,632 aerial photographs of peninsular Malaysia in the Williams-Hunt Collection comprise more than half of the 5000+ pictures gathered by Williams-Hunt during a posting in Singapore under the Combined Photographic



Interpretation Center (CPIC) and Allied Photographic Interpretation Unit for the Far East (APIC FE). The Malaysia cover includes many different parts of the peninsula, including both many highland areas and the lowland southeast region with its distinct cultivation patterns.

Photographs from the Williams-Hunt Collection of the southeast lowlands of peninsular Malaysia occupied by the Semelai peoples have been used in a recent study by Gisnno and Bayr (2009). The lowland ecology of the region contrasts with the more usual picture of the upland *Orang Asli* in an area more 'influenced by and acculturated to Malay language and culture' and immigrants of later periods (Gianno & Bayr 2009). For this study, the Williams-Hunt photographs proved invaluable in assessing changes in the agricultural and settlement patterns, many of which were 'irreversibly altered' during the years of the Emergency.¹³ This southern *Orang Asli* group raises an issue addressed by Gianno and Bayr that would have been of interest for Williams-Hunt: the relationship between production of commodities, demographic change and interaction with the environment. As with many inland areas, the southern *Orang Asli* traded with other regions, providing goods such as camphor and gutta percha (*Palaquium gutta* L latex).

The specifics of the Semelai fall within a wider 'Malayic' social pattern of both swidden farming and collecting carried out in relation to the wet and dry portions of the year in a region with *circa* 2060mm annual precipitation. The Williams-Hunt photographs profiled much greater rice cultivation than seen at present with the study of the southeast region mapping the complexity of land use and underlining the varied ecology of the diverse settlements collectively called *Orang Asli*. The land use recorded by the Williams-Hunt photographs no longer exists, but in 1948 the Semelai appear to have supported 'rice-focused and cassava-backed intensive swiddening', hunting, and fishing economy alongside an upland-lowland network of trade.¹⁴ The Williams-Hunt collection provided new evidence to support Gianno and Bayr's emphasis on the need to contextualize *Orang Asli* cultures historically and environmentally through examination of ethnographic and historic accounts in tandem with aerial cover.¹⁵

PERSONAL LIFE AND CAREER

In 1950, Williams-Hunt married Wa Draman (Photo 8), daughter of a Semai chief. The marriage must have caused at least informal comment, with the general policy in British Malaya not favoring local marriage.¹⁶ Wa Draman travelled with her husband to England in his 1952 trip to collect objects for the new museum in Kuala Lumpur, assisting him in the selection of material. Her visit to the United Kingdom was unusual in this era, thus eliciting various popular journalistic comments, usually accompanied by a photograph commenting on her beauty:



Photo 8. Wa Draman, the wife of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt

“The first Malayan Aborigine woman to visit British took a last look at he lights of London last night before leaving by Comet for Malaya... Wa Draman stood for two hours on Tuesday waiting for the Queen to pass to open the Parliament.”¹⁷

“Wa Draman, the pretty Sakai girl who went to London to see the Queen...enjoyed fish and chips and she did not even mind the weather. The two institutions which most impressed her, however, were the royal Family and the ‘big, strong, polite London bobbies’.”¹⁸

In early June, 1953, Williams-Hunt had made a journey to Tapah for the wedding of his sister-in-law. On the return trek to his wife’s village, the wooden bridge he was crossing collapsed, and in his fall Williams-Hunt’s chest was pierced by one of the wooden supports. He had the presence of mind and strength to instruct those with him not to remove the wooden stake or he would bleed to death, so a rough stretcher was made from gunny sacks and he was carried down to the nearest road. Waiting for transport with a group gathered around him, he commented that some day he would make a study of human legs – another extraordinary example of his combination of humor, frankness and intellect.¹⁹ He died eight days later in Batu Gajah hospital on June 11, 1953. His passing was noted internationally and his local fame as ‘Tuan Janggut (Mr. Beard) prompted a large and well attended traditional Semai funeral that included the dancing until late into the evening hours.²⁰ Their child, Tony Williams-Hunt, known locally as ‘Bah Tony’ was born only three weeks before his father’s untimely demise. Tony Williams-Hunt recalls that their house had many photographs about, which his mother notes were taken by her husband.²¹ Much of Tony’s life has been devoted to the cause of the *Orang Asli*, thus fulfilling in many ways the hopes and aims of his father.



Photo 9. The grave of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt as it was erected in 1950s (after Gouldsbury 1960)



Photo 10. Tony Williams-Hunt with Prof. Dato' Dr. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik A. Rahman, Deputy Director, ATMA, at the gravesite of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, October 2009

Tony Beamish, a colleague of Peter Williams-Hunt helped design the grave (Photo 9) in the peaceful hillside cemetery just outside Wa Draman's village near Tapah. An *attap* lean-to was constructed, with a headstone and foot-marking stone still maintained at the grave today (Photo 10). At the time of the burial, many local residents added river stones to the surround around the fenced grave area and Tony Beamish erected two stone markers with sherds of porcelain commemorating the rich career and life of his friend.²²

THE WILLIAMS-HUNT COLLECTION (SOAS)

After P.D.R. Williams-Hunt's untimely and tragic demise, his collection of aerial photographs were sent to his old colleague John Bradford in Oxford. Sadly, Bradford was institutionalized and the collection lay largely unused. Nonetheless, it was safely stored in the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford. The photographs were consulted by a few scholars including Quartich Wales but were considered unusable for they had no inventory, with more than fifty boxes of prints, many taped with the original packing dating to the time of Williams-Hunt's death (Quaritch- Wales 1957).

Thanks to a suggestion of Pisit Charoenwongsa, then with the Fine Arts Department of Thailand,²³ I searched out the photographs in the 1980s during my doctoral work at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. With funding from the Southeast Asia Committee of the British Academy and help from Prof. Ian Glover, my Supervisor, and Prof. Ralph Smith at SOAS the pictures were transferred to SOAS and new prints were made from the fading and curled originals.

Research at the Public Records Office at Kew Gardens provided supplementary data on the aircraft, flight patterns and often the log book of the pilots who had flown the missions. The original photographs and a set of the new images are now housed in the SOAS library managed by the Art Librarian, Y. Yasumura, with copies of the relevant photographs held by the National Archives of Malaysia, the Singapore National Library, the National Library of Thailand, and the Royal Angkor Foundation (Budapest). I donated two hundred images to the National Archives of Myanmar, and a full set of the images was acquired by the Centre for Southeast Asia Studies (CSEAS), University of Kyoto.

During a research secondment to the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto, Dr. Surat Lertlum of Chulachomklao Military Academy (CRMA), Bangkok digitized the images at high resolutions and placed the cover of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and some photographs of Vientiane and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) online as noted above, called the 'Geo-Spatial Digital Archive for Southeast Asia' [<http://gdap.crma.ac.th/>].

WILLIAMS-HUNT AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

The Williams-Hunt Collection (SOAS) is many things to different people, but first and foremost, a testimony to the character and work of P.D.R. Williams-Hunt. On many occasions over the past years I have reflected upon his brief life and the high regard in which he was held in lands far from those of his birth. He was a careful and devoted scholar, seemingly finding refuge in his work with aerial photographs during his postings to many different areas of Southeast



Asia. The diverse images he chose indicate a man of imagination and restraint: the packets of his photographs that came to me sometimes contained only one picture and others were bulging with images. In all cases, Williams-Hunt had made an individual folder, stapled and labeled with the name of the area as he recorded it from various sources. Each group of pictures thus has a story of a place to tell, sometimes one of geographical change from the winding course of a river, to a coastal feature that caught Williams-Hunt's eye.

From his selection of pictures and his writings, his interest in the correlation of ecological change and human habitation brings together the photographs of the ancient circular sites in Northeast Thailand and the villages such as Tapah of the Semai where he is buried. In this merging of geographical, ethnic, social and temporal contexts, the Williams-Hunt Collection expresses a unique perspective on the meaning of the cultural landscapes of peninsular Malaysia and many other regions of Southeast Asia (Yeoh & Kong 1995).

Given Williams-Hunt's breadth of vision, he pioneered many fields, from the interpretation of aerial photographs in archaeological and ethnographic research to an understanding of the significance of place, whether permanent or shifting settlement, in the cultural identity of the peoples of the Malay Peninsula. His work recalls mention by Puan Rosnawati Othman on harmony in contrast in the woodcarving of the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, a sentiment expressing well one facet of the work of Williams-Hunt.²⁴ Indeed, the fluid woodcarving tradition of the late Nik Rashidden perpetuated at the Kandis Centre in Kelantan, Terengganu (ATMA) continues to draw inspiration from the forested areas covered in the Williams-Hunt Collection.²⁵ The very act of carving was and is understood as drawing upon the 'spirit of the wood', the *Semangat* to create a vibrant and original work of art.

This perception of change and enterprise noted in the quotation at the start of this paper likewise underlies the intersection between man and ecology in upland and lowland regions such as the Semai and Semelai. Williams-Hunt mapped the changing shorelines around Johore and the different types of clearings made by Chinese, *Orang Asli* and 'bandits' in the Perak uplands of the northwest in his 1948 *Jungle Clearings*. Gianno and Bayr (2009) have documented the striking alteration to patterns of subsistence cultivation in the southeast from the time of the Williams-Hunt photographs to the present day.

All these and other studies using the Williams-Hunt photographs unite community, ethnicity and history to create a myriad of distinctive social and often spiritual places in diverse regions (Yeoh & Kong 1995). The *Orang Asli* lands took on new significances over years and while some such as seen in the Emergency are tangible, values are not always visible, leaving much to be learned about the places within which the contexts of today were initiated (Yeoh & Kong 1995).

NOTES

- ¹ My thanks also to Senior Research Fellows Assoc. Prof. Salmah Abu Mansor (Visual Arts); Assoc. Prof. Dr. Haziyah Hussin (Textiles); Assoc. Prof. Dr. Asyaari Mohamad (Archaeology) as well as the Assistant Registrar, Syuhada Nur Abd. Rahman and the Ph.D. candidate in Archaeology, Zuliskandar Ramli (Archaeology).
- ² Geoffrey Benjamin, 'Austroasiatic Subgroupings', 1976, p. 90-91 cites 8000 BP identified by Solheim as a probable era for the emergence of sedentarisation in Malaya and 6000 BP seeing well developed seafaring (W.G. Solheim II, 'Northern Thailand, Southeast Asia, and world prehistory' *Asian perspectives*, Vol. 13, 1970: 145-162)
- ³ Elizabeth Moore, *Early landscapes of Myanmar* (Bangkok, River Books).
- ⁴ F.M. Underhill, 'Mr. P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, devoted worker among the Malayan aborigines', *The Times*, p.8, cited by Makeswary Periasamy, 'A View from the Top: Williams-Hunt Aerial Photograph Collection', *Biblio Asia*, National Library Singapore, Vol. 5, Issue 1, April 2009, pp. 38-42.
- ⁵ The 'Geo-Spatial Digital Archive for Southeast Asia' (<http://gdap.crma.ac.th/>). This collaborative effort is between the author and the library at SOAS, the Centre for Southeast Asia Studies (CSEAS), University of Kyoto; the Inter-University Network of Thailand (UniNet) and Surat Lertlum, Chulachomklao Military Academy (CRMA), Bangkok. It is hoped that under the ATMA-SOAS Memorandum of Understanding that the ATMA e-portal may in future make the cover of Malaysia available to the wider public, with a set of the prints of Malaysia presently housed in the National Archives of Malaysia.
- ⁶ Gordon P. Means, 'The Orang Asli: Aboriginal Policies in Malaysia', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Winter, 1985-1986), pp. 637-652, p. 644 citing P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines*, (Kuala Lumpur, The Government Press, 1952), p. 76-79.
- ⁷ Courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ⁸ 'Sakai being Shielded, Advisor gives Assurance on London Visit', *Malay Mail*, November 1952, courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ⁹ Ted Gold, 'Who will succeed Williams-Hunt?', *Malay Mail*, June 18, 1953, courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ¹⁰ 'Museum to Be Rebuilt in Capital', *Malay Mail*, October 25, 1952, courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ¹¹ Periasamy, 'A View from the Top', *Biblio Asia*, 2009, pp.40-41 citing John Bradford, 'Peter Williams-Hunt: 1918-1953', *Man*, Vol.53, pp. 175-176; W. Fagg, 'Obituary: Mr. P.D. R. Williams-Hunt: devoted worker among Malayan aborigines', *The Times*, June 16, 1953; Moore 1984, p. 99-100 and 'A jungle villages goes into mourning: the 'Tuan Jangot' is dead', *The Straits Times*, June 13, 1953, p.1. [*Jangot* is 'beard']
- ¹² Williams-Hunt used photographs in *Jungle Clearings* flown by the Royal Air Force 81 PR (Photo reconnaissance) Squadron and 1914 Flight of the A.O.P. taken in April and May of 1948.
- ¹³ Gianno and Bayr, 'Semelai', 2009, p. 155
- ¹⁴ Gianno and Bayr, 'Semelai', 2009, p. 154-157, 184
- ¹⁵ Gianno and Bayr, 'Semelai', 2009, p. 184
- ¹⁶ Rahal Hassan, personal communication, 13 October 2009.
- ¹⁷ "She waits 2 hours for Queen to pass", *Malay Mail*, November 11, 1952; , courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09

- ¹⁸ “Wa Draman Liked Fish and Chips, Sakai girl went to see the Queen”, *Straits Times*, November 13, 1952; courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ¹⁹ Tony Williams-Hunt, personal communication, 10.09
- ²⁰ Periasamy, ‘A View from the Top’, *Biblio Asia*, 2009, pp.40-41 citing *The Straits Times*, June 13, 1953 and June 15, 1953; “The ‘Tuan Jangot’ is dead, a jungle village goes into mourning”, *Straits Times*, June 13, 1953; Gouldsbury, *Jungle Nurse*, p. 98; courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ²¹ Tony Williams-Hunt, personal communication, 3 September 2009
- ²² “Friends plan memorial for Williams-Hunt, *Malay Mail*, September 9, 1953; courtesy Tony Williams-Hunt, 10.09
- ²³ At present, Ex-Officio Member) Centre Director of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA), Bangkok, Thailand
- ²⁴ Puan Rosnawati Othman in lecture titled ‘*The Language Of The Langkasuka Motive*’ for the exhibition, *The Spirit of Wood* at SOAS, January 21, 2004.
- ²⁵ Kandis Resource Center, Lot 225, Kg. Kandis, Telong, 16310 Bachok, Kelantan, Malaysia.

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